COP 26: This Time, Africa Must Not Accept Being Bullied

The UN Climate Summit, which was recently held in Glasgow, Scotland, claimed to "bring together governments from around the world to agree coordinated action to tackle climate change." And yet, like many of its predecessors ended with barely any concrete agreement in the stickiest of the issues: cuts to emissions of carbon dioxide (CO2). As a result, countries will meet next year to pledge cuts to emissions of CO2. Africa has always got a raw deal from most of these climate summits. The summits tend to put the continent under undue pressure to 'help' the world fight climate change by turning to green energy. However, it is unfair to ask African countries to turn to expensive sources of 'green' energy when they barely have used any energy at all, dirty or not, at a time when most regions of the continent are barely beginning their own industrial revolution that western nations went through 200 years ago.

On the one hand, rich countries account for only 12% of the world population but are responsible for half of all the CO2 emissions over the past 170 years, according to the New York Times. The United States has, over this period, emitted the most carbon dioxide, totalling a quarter of all emissions. The Developed World's ferocious industrialization craze, greed and reckless capitalism have set our beautiful planet onto a journey to becoming a hot stove. Yet, the consequences of that greed have been more devastating to poor countries that have very little to do with it. A warming planet has created deadly heatwaves, drought, famine, etc – natural disasters that normally hit the poorer world the hardest.

On the other hand, most of Africa is currently still way back on the development trajectory that the fumes that come from her still emerging industrialization and resource exploitation

are too low; they barely register on the global carbon emissions Richter scale. The continent accounts for only 2–3 per cent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions from energy and industrial sources, and, [according](#) to the World Resources Institute, Africa's per capita rate of emissions of carbon dioxide in the year 2000 was 0.8 metric tons per person, compared with a global figure of 3.9 tons per person. In fact, even the little being emitted in Africa is largely by predatory (western and Chinese) incursion on the continent, whereby all profits of this exploitation are repatriated, leaving Africans with almost nothing. For instance, the value of Illicit Financial Flows — IFFs — out of Africa by large global corporations is [estimated](#) by the UN to be at nearly $100bn annually.

Despite all of the above, the dynamics you get when looking at the worth that is given to the concerns of those other 'governments from around the world' besides the world's biggest polluters are shocking. It's as if our concerns have no bearing in policy considerations. As long as the situation remains unchanged, Africa should not be bullied into signing historically unfair, frivolous agreements that keep the continent in a subservient climate change position to meet the interests of the supposedly richer countries.

African countries worked hard to harmonise their positions in Glasgow, but the problem is not just in the present; it is also in the past. Simply put, rich countries, which made their wealth by burning the planet, must pay their fair share first. At the same summit ten years ago, these countries promised to help Africa and other developing regions deal with the devastating effects of climate change by contributing billions of dollars annually towards climate change adaptation. As is their wont, many of these countries [haven't fulfilled these promises](#).

Secondly, African countries should leverage all possible sources of affordable energy to facilitate their development

journey, even if they have to make some mistakes in so doing. This means exploring affordable, albeit somewhat environmentally harmful, sources of energy to get to a level where we can even begin crawling manufacturing-wise because, right now, we aren't even at the stage of moving, let alone taking off into the manufacturing stratosphere. At this moment, Africa's share of global trade is currently only at 2%. It is difficult to significantly increase this by using solar energy to manufacture products.

The international climate governance ecosystem cannot follow the dictatorial and unfair format of the UN Security Council where a handful of countries force their will on the rest of the world; or the unfair trade negotiation practices of the World Trade Organization, or the predatory lending of the World Bank and the IMF. When it comes to climate, an issue upon which our very lives and those of our children depend, we must, for once, put our foot down.

Most importantly, Africans must change the terms of interaction. The current format, which does not prioritize the concerns of the global south, should not remain the main platform for policy formulation with regard to the fight against climate change. Africa, through its regional and continental bodies, has to find the needed financial resources to fund climate change mitigation programmes in case the so-called rich countries fail to do their part as they have done in the past.

In 2019, the Trump administration [pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement](), complaining that it asks America too much, yet China is currently the bigger polluter. Africans, on the other hand, have signed agreements devoid of the proper mechanisms to ensure that either rich countries would meet their financial obligations or Africans are able to move forward even without the compliance of the rich countries with international treaties. The consequences on our people have been dire. COP 26 should have been different.